

PULSE-CONTROLLED MICROPIPELINE ARCHITECTURE

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Technical Field:

The present invention relates in general to asynchronous logic circuits, and in particular, to an asynchronous control circuit. More particularly, the present invention relates to a pulse-controlled asynchronous latching control circuit having higher data transfer speed and lower logic gate overhead requirements.

2. Description of the Related Art:

Pipelining is commonly utilized for decomposing a data processing operation into multiple concurrently operating stages to increase throughput at the cost of a moderate increase in latency and logic overhead. A wide variety of applications, such as digital signal processors, video processors, and general purpose processors can take advantage of pipeline architecture. Each of these applications may advantageously utilize pipelining to process data in stages where the processing result of one stage is passed to a subsequent stage for further processing. Multiple processing stages are connected together into a series of stages with the stages operating on data as the data passes along from one stage to the next.

There are a variety of distinctions among pipeline processors. One distinction being whether the pipelined stages operate in unison in accordance with an external global clock (a synchronous pipeline), or operate independently based on local events (an asynchronous pipeline).

In synchronous pipelines, synchronization of the different processing stages requires that the frequency of the global control clock accommodate the foreseeable worst-case delay for the slowest processing stage. Thus, in a synchronous pipeline design, some processing stages will complete respective operations earlier than other stages and must then wait for all processing stages to complete their operations. The speed of synchronous processing is directly controlled by the global clock frequency and thus can be increased by increasing the speed of the global clock.

A problem with increasing the synchronous clock frequency is clock skew. A circuit can only operate synchronously if all parts of it receive the clock signal at the same time. However, clock signals are delayed as they propagate through the system and, even on a single chip, clock skew is a problem at higher frequencies.

Asynchronous pipelines avoid worst-case timing and clock skew problems since they include no external clock to govern the timing of state changes among the pipelined stages. Instead, asynchronous stages exchange data at mutually negotiated times with no external timing regulation. More specifically, these mutually negotiated

exchanges are locally synchronized using event-driven communication in which logic transitions on control lines act to request the start of a transfer and acknowledge its completion. By removing the global clock, asynchronous pipelines have the advantage of elimination of clock skew problems, freedom from worst-case design restrictions, and automatic power-down of unused circuitry.

A "micropipeline" is a common asynchronous pipeline design invented by Ivan Sutherland as set forth in U.S. Pat. No. 4,837,740 and U.S. Pat. No. 5,187,800, the pertinent portions of which are incorporated herein by reference. The approach in Sutherland's micropipeline utilizes bundled data with a transition-signaled handshake protocol to control data transfers. A block diagram of a sender/receiver interface within a conventional micropipeline is illustrated in **FIG. 1**.

Two stages of a micropipeline 100 are depicted in **FIG. 1**, including a sender stage 102 that delivers data in accordance with the micropipeline handshake protocol to a receiver stage 104. As depicted in **FIG. 1**, the interface between sender stage 102 and receiver stage 104 includes a data path 106. A request line 110 and acknowledge line 108 are delivered over control paths.

A request signal from sender 102 to receiver 104 is delivered by a logic transition on line 110 when data at the output of sender 102 is valid (ready to be delivered to receiver stage 104). An acknowledge signal from

receiver 104 to sender 102 is delivered by a logic transition on acknowledge line 108 when the data has been processed by receiver 104. This data transfer control protocol results in no upper bound delay between consecutive events. As long as the data bundling constraints are met (i.e., the data transfer occurs in accordance with the handshake protocol described above), micropipeline 100 is delay-insensitive.

There are two alternative signaling protocols available for handshaking utilizing request line 110 and acknowledge line 108; namely a two-phase protocol and a four-phase protocol. The behavior of request line 110 and acknowledge line 108 for a four-phase micropipeline control protocol is depicted in FIG. 2A.

The four-phase protocol is a return to zero protocol. FIG. 2A illustrates the relative behavior of a request signal, *req1*, an acknowledge signal, *ack1*, and a corresponding data signal, *data1*, during a single four-phase data transfer cycle. The rising edge of *req1* signals the validity of data within sender 102 and the readiness of sender 102 to send the data. The rising edge of *ack1* indicates that the data has been received and processed by receiver 104. It should be noted that the falling edges of *req1* and *ack1* comprise the recovery phase of the four-phase protocol during which no data transfer occurs. A widely recognized advantage of implementing a four-phase micropipeline handshake protocol is that four-phase macromodule components are relatively simple and provide optimum latch control.

A two-phase micropipeline handshake protocol is depicted in **FIG. 4B**. The rising edges of a request signal, *req*, and an acknowledge signal, *ack*, signal the start and end of validity for a data signal, *data*, as for the four-phase protocol. As seen in **FIG. 4B**, however, a two-phase protocol does not have a return to zero phase. Instead, the handshake finishes with *req* and *ack* at a logic high. The subsequent falling edges of *req* and *ack* initiate the next handshake for the next set of valid *data*.

Whereas a four-phase protocol provides superior latch control, a two-phase protocol yields a higher transfer frequency. Other potential advantages of two-phase signaling includes that fact that fewer signal transitions are required which reduces power consumption and that the lack of a recovery phase provides for faster data transfer across multiple stages. The control circuits utilized in standard micropipelines provide control signals for level-sensitive latches within the micropipeline data path. Such level-sensitive latches require two clock elements, such as two half latches, to create a complete latching stage (i.e., a stage that can hold and propagate information). To implement two-phase signaling within half latches, two-to-four phase converters are required on each latch controller which greatly increases hardware overhead and control signaling complexity. Another approach is to replace level-sensitive latches with more complex dual-edge triggered flip-flops.

Current micropipeline design must therefore decide between the simpler design and reduced hardware overhead of a four-phase architecture or the faster but more complex two-phase control architecture.

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From the foregoing, it can be appreciated that a need exists within a micropipeline architecture for an interface between control elements and data path latches that would permit two-phase signaling with minimal hardware overhead.

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SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

5 A control circuit for permitting a two-phase data transfer protocol between stages in a micropipeline is disclosed herein. In accordance with the teachings of the present invention, the control circuit includes a control element for generating a data transfer control signal that governs data transport through a level-sensitive latch within the micropipeline. The control circuit further includes a dual-pulse generator receiving the data transfer control signal at its input and providing its output to the control input of the level-sensitive latch. The dual pulse generator converts a rising edge of the data transfer control signal into a first data transfer pulse and a falling edge of the data transfer control signal into a second data transfer pulse such that the micropipeline transfers data during both the rising edge and the falling edge.

20 All objects, features, and advantages of the present invention will become apparent in the following detailed written description.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The novel features believed characteristic of the invention are set forth in the appended claims. The invention itself however, as well as a preferred mode of use, further objects and advantages thereof, will best be understood by reference to the following detailed description of an illustrative embodiment when read in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, wherein:

FIG. 1 is a block diagram depicting an inter-stage data and control interface in a conventional micropipeline;

FIG. 2 illustrates a conventional micropipeline in which level-sensitive latches are utilized for implementing a four-phase data transfer handshake protocol;

FIG. 3 is a transistor-level illustration of a micropipeline control element applicable within the micropipeline control circuit of the present invention;

FIG. 4A is a signal diagram illustrating a four-phase micropipeline handshake protocol;

FIG. 4B is a signal diagram depicting a two-phase micropipeline handshake protocol;

FIG. 5 depicts a micropipeline incorporating a dual pulse control signal interface in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 6 is a gate level depiction of a dual pulse generator applicable to the micropipeline in **FIG. 5** in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention; and

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FIG. 7 is a timing diagram illustrating a dual pulse data transfer handshake protocol for the micropipeline in **FIG. 5**.

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DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

This invention is described in a preferred embodiment in the following description with reference to the figures. While this invention is described in terms of the best mode for achieving this invention's objectives, it will be appreciated by those skilled in the art that variations may be accomplished in view of these teachings without deviating from the spirit or scope of the present invention.

With reference now to the figures wherein like reference numerals refer to like and corresponding parts throughout, and in particular with reference to to **FIG. 2**, there is illustrated a conventional micropipeline **200** in which level-sensitive latches are utilized for implementing a four-phase data transfer handshake protocol. A data path **220** within micropipeline **200** includes data processing stages **222** and **224** wherein data is processed in accordance with within combinatorial logic functions *F* and *G*.

In accordance with conventional micropipeline design, data path **220** further includes a series of level-sensitive half-latches **214**, **216**, and **218** that serve to hold and propagate data between processing stages **222** and **224** as well as previous and subsequent processing stages not depicted. A wide variety of latch designs are available for latches **214**, **216** and **218** including, for example, level-sensitive D-latches. In accordance with well known level-sensitive half-latch operating

principles, a particular control signal polarity (high or low) will cause such latches to open and thus become transparent to data at their inputs. The sequence and timing of the latching stages must be carefully set to prevent data collisions among the respective data processing stages. In the depicted example, it is assumed that latches 214, 216, and 218 are opened upon receiving a high control signal.

10 Micropipeline 200 further includes a control path 215 comprising multiple control elements for providing sequential data transfer control between data processing stages 222 and 224. Specifically three Muller C-elements 202, 204, and 206 are utilized to implement such micropipeline control. FIG. 3 is a transistor-level illustration of a an exemplary micropipeline control element applicable within micropipeline 200.

15 Referring to FIG. 3, a Muller C-element 300 is depicted as producing a control (ctrl) output from a request (req) input and an acknowledge (ack) input. Muller C-element 300 includes a pull-up net comprising a pair of PFET's 302 and 304 and a pull-down net comprising a pair of NFET's 306 and 308. In accordance with the gate-level C-element representations in FIG. 2 (as well as in the preferred embodiment depicted in FIG. 5) the ack input is inverted by an input inverter 314. A double inversion net, comprising a pair of inverters 310 and 316, sets and maintains the ctrl output with the aid of a weak feedback inverter 312. Muller C-element 300 generates the ctrl output signal as follows.

When the *ack* signal is a logic high and the *req* signal is a logic low, the pull-down net switches on and the *ctrl* output is set to a logic low. If subsequently the *ack* signal switches to a logic low while the *req* signal remains at a logic low, the pull-down net is switched off while the pull-up net remains off, resulting in the *ctrl* output being held by weak feedback inverter 312 at a logic low. Similarly, if after the *ctrl* output is set low, the *req* signal switches to a logic high while the *ack* signal remains at a logic high, the pull-down net is switched off while the pull-up net remains off, resulting in the *ctrl* output remaining low.

When the *ack* signal is a logic low and the *req* signal is a logic high, the pull-up net switches on and the *ctrl* output is set to a logic high. If subsequently the *ack* signal switches to a logic high while the *req* signal remains at a logic high, the pull-up net is switched off while the pull-down net remains off, resulting in the *ctrl* output being held by weak feedback inverter 312 at a logic high. Similarly, if after the *ctrl* output is set high, the *req* signal switches to a logic low while the *ack* signal remains at a logic low, the pull-up net is switched off while the pull-down net remains off, resulting in the *ctrl* output remaining high.

The operation of a Muller C-element as described above is commonly understood by those skilled in the asynchronous pipeline field of art. A detailed description of C-elements is provided in by Sutherland in Micropipelines, 32 Communications of ACM 720 (1989), the subject matter of which is incorporated herein by

reference. Alternative logic configurations for constructing a C-element such as those depicted in *U.S. Pat. No. 5,732,233 (1998)* are well-known in the art and are incorporated herein by reference.

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Referring back to **FIG. 2**, and in accordance with the foregoing description of control element operating principles, the control output of any of C-elements **202**, **204**, or **206** changes state, regardless of its previous state, only after both of its *req* and *ack* inputs have changed state. Otherwise each C-element retains its current state. Thereafter, if either one of *req* or *ack* changes states, the output remains unchanged from the immediately preceding state. When both *req* and *ack* have changed from high to low, or from low to high, the output also changes from high to low, or from low to high, as the case may be.

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The *req* and *ack* lines depicted in **FIG. 2** form an inter-stage handshake interface between C-elements **202**, **204**, and **206**. Each of the *req* signals that are applied as inputs to each C-element, originate as output data transfer control signals from a previous stage. Each C-element also receives an *ack* input that is delivered from the output of the immediately subsequent C-element.

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In addition to serving as handshake control signals *req* and *ack*, the outputs from each of C-elements **202**, **204**, and **206** are utilized as control inputs for level-sensitive latches **214**, **216**, and **218**, respectively. Assuming positive level activation for the latches, a

logic high produced as the latch control signal from a C-element results in opening the corresponding latch.

Referring to **FIG. 4A** in conjunction with **FIG. 2**, a four-phase data transfer operation for delivering data from data processing stage 222 to data processing stage 224 through latches 216 is illustrated. **FIG. 4A** depicts the relative behavior of *req1* and *ack1* at the inputs of C-elements 204 and 202 respectively, and a corresponding data signal, *data1*, during a single four-phase data transfer cycle. It should be noted that for minimum data transfer latency, a conventional micropipeline such as micropipeline 200 is typically initialized with all data latches open. However, the two-phase data transfer protocol of the present invention (as described with reference to **FIG.s 5** and 7) is not operable if the data transfer latches are open in the initialized and empty states. Therefore, to provide a consistent base of reference, an analogous "initially closed" latch state for micropipeline 200 is described herein.

To pass *data1* through latches 214 into processing stage 222, C-element 202 asserts a data transfer control signal at its output. This asserted data transfer control signal propagates through a delay device 208 to assert *req1* at the input of C-element 204. Delay device 208 is included within the control line connecting the output of C-element 202 to the input of C-element 204 to delay the assertion of *req1* with respect to the activation signal applied by C-element 202 to latches 214

to ensure that *data1* is valid at the input of latches 216 prior to C-element opening latches 216.

5 The data transfer request from C-element 202 to C-element 204 is illustrated by the rising edge of *req1* in FIG. 4A. Upon receipt of *req1*, and assuming that *ack2* is low, C-element 204, having received two logic highs at its inputs, produces a logic high at its output 212 thus opening level-sensitive latches 216 and allowing *data1* to pass through to processing stage 224.

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20 The asserted data transfer control signal at output 212 asserts *ack1* at the input of C-element 202. The rising edge of *ack1* indicates that the data has been received and processed by processing stage 224. In accordance with the foregoing description of C-element behavior, the assertion of *ack1* together with the de-assertion (high-to-low) of the *req0* input to C-element 202 results in the data transfer control signal at the output of C-element 202 being de-asserted and latches 214 being closed. The de-asserted transfer control signal at the output of C-element 202 is delayed through delay device 208 before de-asserting *req1* at the input of C-element 204.

25 The de-assertion of the request signal into C-element 204 is illustrated in FIG. 4A as the falling edge of *req1*. The acknowledge input to C-element 204, *ack2*, has been asserted in sequence in the same manner as that described for *ack1* by the time *req1* has been de-asserted. Upon de-assertion of *req1* and assertion of *ack2*, data

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transfer control output 212 is de-asserted, resulting in the de-assertion of *ack1* as depicted by the falling edge of *ack1* in FIG. 4A. The falling edges of *req1* and *ack1* at the inputs of C-elements 204 and 202, respectively, comprise the recovery phase of the four-phase protocol during which no data transfer occurs across processing stages 222 and 224.

It is upon the four-phase protocol micropipeline 200 of FIG. 2 that the pulse-controlled design of the present invention improves. Referring now to FIG. 5, there is depicted a micropipeline 500 incorporating a dual pulse control circuit in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention. As with micropipeline 200 in FIG. 2, micropipeline 500 includes data path 220 wherein data processing stages 222 and 224 process data in accordance with within combinatorial logic functions *F* and *G*.

Within data path 220, half-latches 214, 216, and 218 hold and propagate data between processing stages 222 and 224 as well as previous and subsequent processing stages not depicted. Assuming positive level activation for the latches, a logic high applied to the control input of any of half-latches 214, 216, or 218 results in the corresponding latch opening.

The sequence and timing of the latching stages must be carefully set to prevent data collisions among the respective data processing stages. For the conventional micropipeline depicted in FIG. 2, data collisions are

avoided by implementing the four-phase data transfer protocol illustrated in **FIG. 4A** whereby successive latching stages are opened and closed by the control outputs of the C-elements in accordance with the *req* and *ack* handshake signals. As explained in further detail hereinbelow, micropipeline **500** provides data isolation and validity assurances by incorporating a pulse-controlled data latching technique.

Control path **215** includes C-elements **202**, **204**, and **206** for providing sequential data transfer control between data processing stages **222** and **224**. Request and acknowledge lines form an inter-stage handshake interface among C-elements **202**, **204**, and **206**.

In accordance with the teachings of the present invention, micropipeline **500** includes a control circuit **515** that includes a series of dual pulse generators **502**, **504**, and **506**, coupled to control path **215**. Specifically, dual pulse generators **502**, **504**, and **506** serve as a pulse-control interface **510** between C-elements **202**, **204**, and **206**, and half-latches **214**, **216**, and **218**. Each of dual pulse generators **502**, **504**, and **506** translates the level-sensitive control signaling provided at the outputs of C-elements **202**, **204**, and **206** into a dual pulse data transfer control signal that enables each of half-latches **214**, **216**, and **218** to open and close (propagate and hold) during each edge transition of a data transfer control signal at the outputs of the C-elements. **FIG. 6** is a gate-level representation of a dual pulse generator applicable to the embodiment depicted in **FIG. 5**.

Referring to FIG. 6, dual pulse generator 504 includes a two-input exclusive-OR (XOR) logic gate 606 receiving a data transfer control signal directly from C-element 204 at one input and a delayed data transfer control signal at the other input. The delay on the data transfer control signal is imparted by a pair of inverters 608. Dual pulse generator 604 produces a pulse at output node 505 on both a rising edge and a falling edge of the data transfer control signal from C-element 204. It should be noted that a wide variety of circuit configurations are available for generating a pulse on both a rising and a falling edge input, and that the dual pulse generator incorporated within the present invention is not limited to the particular implementation depicted in FIG. 6.

Referring back to FIG. 5, each of dual pulse generators 502, 504, and 506 receive as inputs, the outputs of the C-elements 202, 204, and 206, respectively. Referring to FIG. 7 in conjunction with FIG. 5, a two-phase data transfer operation for delivering data from data processing stage 222 to data processing stage 224 through latches 216 is illustrated. FIG. 7 depicts the relative behavior of *req1* and *ack1*, and corresponding data signal, *data1*, during two 2-phase data transfer cycles.

To pass *data1* through latches 214 into processing stage 222 from the processing stage preceding stage 222, C-element 202 asserts (low-to-high) a data transfer control signal at its output. This asserted data

transfer control signal propagates through delay device 208 to assert *req1* at the input of C-element 204.

5 The data transfer request from C-element 202 to C-element 204 is illustrated by the rising edge of *req1* in FIG. 7. Upon receipt of *req1*, and assuming that *ack2* is low, C-element 204, having received two logic highs at its inputs, asserts a logic high at its output 212. This low-to-high transition at output 212 is depicted in FIG. 7 as the rising edge of *ack1* which coincides with the data transfer control signal at node 212.

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20 Upon receipt of the rising edge of *ctrl1*, dual pulse generator 504 produces a pulse on output node 505, depicted as *pulse* in FIG. 7. The duration of this pulse is set in accordance with the delay design of dual pulse generator 504. For the dual pulse generator design depicted in FIG. 6, the delay can be set by selecting the number of pairs of inverters in accordance with the desired pulse width. The temporary assertion of *pulse* during *data1* valid results in level-sensitive latches 216 being briefly opened and then closed as *pulse* returns to a logic low thus allowing *data1* to pass through to processing stage 224.

25 The rising edge of *ack1* at the input of C-element 202 indicates that the data has been received and processed by processing stage 224. The assertion of *ack1* together with the de-assertion (high-to-low) of the *req0* input to C-element 202 results in the data transfer control signal at the output of C-element 202 being de-

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asserted. It should be noted that latches 214, being controlled in the same manner as that described for latches 216, are opened briefly during this high-to-low transition at the output of C-element 202 and will thus permit data to pass from the preceding data processing stage to data processing stage 222.

The de-asserted data transfer control signal at the output of C-element 202 is delayed through delay device 208 before de-asserting req1 at the input of C-element 204. Prior to the de-assertion of req1, the ack2 input into C-element 204 has been asserted, resulting in a high-to-low transition of ack1 at node 212. In response to the falling edge of ack1, dual pulse generator 504 generates another pulse on output node 505 as depicted in FIG. 7 such that there is no recovery phase during a control signal transition.

While the invention has been particularly shown and described with reference to a preferred embodiment, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that various changes in form and detail may be made therein without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention.